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QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS IN ANY PART OF THE WORLD

Note verbale dated 22 February 2000 from the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Iraq to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Iraq to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations at Geneva presents its compliments to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and has the honour to transmit to it herewith* an in-depth study on the effect of the economic embargo on various aspects of health in Iraq.

The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Iraq would be grateful to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights if it would kindly consider this study as an official document of the fifty-sixth session of the Commission on Human Rights and have it distributed as such under item 9 of the provisional agenda.

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* The annex is reproduced as received, in the language of submission and in English.

Annexe

The impact of the embargo on various aspects of health in Iraq

First of all, we must review the damage caused by the armed military aggression against Iraq in 1991, during which the use of various prohibited weapons, such as depleted uranium, destroyed the infrastructure of the health services. Damage was suffered by 561 health institutions representing 66.1 per cent of the total number of such institutions, including 88 hospitals (71 per cent of the total number of hospitals in the country) in 22 of which sophisticated medical equipment had been installed. Damage was also suffered by 473 primary health-care centres (48 per cent of the total). All of this had an inevitable impact on health services, which were partially or totally disrupted.

In addition to the military aggression, the embargo which was imposed in 1990 and is still continuing has caused further damage as illustrated by the following:

Preventive care

1. The nutritional situation

The surveys conducted in 1990 showed that, of the total number of children weighed at birth, the proportion weighing less than 2.5 kg amounted to no more than 4.5 per cent. During and after 1991, this proportion began to increase, rising to 24.04 per cent by 1999. Likewise, by 1999, the average monthly incidence of malnutrition and emaciation was, respectively, 63.19 and 53.58 times higher than in 1990.

An in-depth survey of the content of the food ration cards also showed that they met less than half of the child's protein and calorie requirements and about 10-17 per cent of the child's iron requirements.

2. Mortality

In spite of the diligent endeavours that the Ministry of Health is making to curb the increase in mortality, it has unfortunately continued to rise at significant rates. A field study conducted by a team from Harvard University at the beginning of the second half of 1991

showed that the mortality rate among infants under 1 year of age amounted to 92.7 per 1,000 live births and the corresponding rate among children under 5 years of age amounted to 128.2 per 1,000 live births. The perinatal maternal mortality rate had likewise risen to 117 per 10,000 live births. Since 1991, there has been a further proportional increase in these rates, as shown by the survey of child and maternal mortality conducted in 1999 which indicated that the mortality rate among infants under 1 year of age amounted to 107.9 per 1,000 live births, the mortality rate among children under 5 years of age amounted to 130.6 per 1,000 live births and the perinatal maternal mortality rate amounted to 294 per 10,000 live births. The principal causes of death were acute respiratory infections, diarrhoea, enteritis and malnutrition.

3. Morbidity

During the period prior to the embargo, Iraq had succeeded in curbing and controlling the spread of contagious and immunoresponsive diseases such as poliomyelitis, diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus and measles. However, following the imposition of the embargo and the deterioration in health and environmental conditions, there was a significant increase in the incidence of these diseases. For example, although no cases of cholera or scabies were reported in 1989, in 1999 the incidence of these diseases amounted to 2,398 and 35,343 cases respectively. The same applies to other diseases such as typhoid, dysentery and viral hepatitis, the incidence of which is, respectively, 13, 31 and 6.5 times higher than in 1989. The incidence of pneumonia among children under 5 years of age rose from 20.89 per 1,000 in 1990 to 45.64 per 1,000 in 1999 and, during the same period, the incidence of diarrhoea among children under 5 years of age likewise rose from 308.09 per 1,000 persons in this age group in 1990 to 308,770 reported cases in 1999 and the rate of hospital admissions, for all causes and in all age groups, declined from 69.43 per 1,000 of the population to 63.9 in 1999.

Therapeutic care

1 Medicines and medical requisites

Iraq was one of the few countries that used to meet its citizens' needs for medicines and medical requisites at extremely low prices compared with those prevailing in other countries of the region. However, following the imposition of the embargo, the situation in regard to medicines and medical requisites deteriorated, as illustrated by the fact that the proposed annual appropriations in 1990 amounted to $326,016,342 with a total actual expenditure of $198,993,135 (i.e. 61 per cent), as compared with 1999 when the proposed annual appropriations amounted to $1,141,401,817 with a total actual expenditure of $8,475,205 (i.e. only 1 per cent).

This situation was further aggravated by the considerable decline in the processing and production of medicines by the State Organization for the Production of Pharmaceuticals at Samarra due to the lack of raw materials and spare parts for the machines in its production facilities. All this has caused considerable suffering to the Iraqi people, in addition to the extensive damage inflicted on the pharmaceutical warehouses as a result of the military aggression. The extensive powers vested in the 661 (Sanctions) Committee have created serious obstacles that have led to the suspension of contracts for medicines, medical appliances and spare parts to a total value of $40,632,152 during phase VI.

2. Major surgical operations

From 1989 to 1999, the proportion of major surgical operations declined by 70.6 per cent due to the non-availability of anaesthetics and other requisites such as surgical ligatures, dressings, appliances and equipment. The same applies to laboratory tests since, due to the non-availability of laboratory diagnostic materials, damage to existing equipment and the impossibility of servicing and maintaining it more than once because of the lack of spare parts, the average monthly number of laboratory tests declined from 515,506 in 1989 to 149,050 in 1999, i.e. a decline of 65.4 per cent.

The environment

The deterioration in the environmental situation in Iraq as a result of the imposition of the embargo is illustrated by the following:

1. Deterioration in the situation of drinking water supply networks.

2. Decline in the quality of the water.

3. Deterioration in the situation of sewage treatment plants and breakdown of waste water pumping stations, as a result of which this water overflows in some residential areas.

4. Decline in garbage collection rates, as a result of which refuse accumulates in most residential districts. In fact, the garbage collection capacity has declined by more than 75 per cent due to the shortage of appropriate vehicles or the lack of spare parts therefor.

5. Suspension of work on service projects, including more than 60 afforestation, drainage and road construction projects.

6. Air pollution due to the higher quantities and concentrations of pollutant emissions from private vehicles and other means of transport in view of the advanced age of their engines and the decline in the quality of the fuel and lubricants used.

7. Suspension of projects to expand green areas, increase plant cover and combat desertification.

8. Acute shortage of the appliances and other requisites needed for environmental control operations to check pollution levels and the concentrations of pollutants.

9. Increased industrial pollution due to the bombardment or the breakdown of control facilities and suspension of the implementation of industrial pollution control projects.

10. Environmental damage resulting from the use of prohibited weapons (depleted uranium) during the aggression against Iraq, which led to the appearance of many previously unknown fungi and agricultural diseases such as curvature of the neck of palm trees, as well as deterioration in the services to combat agricultural blights and the spread of weevils, especially in parts of central and southern Iraq, the death of many birds, increased numbers of ticks in many animals and notable changes in the physiology of plants.

Harm caused by the use of depleted uranium to human life in Iraq

After the iniquitous bombardment and the use of depleted uranium in the aggression against Iraq in 1991, there was a notable increase in morbidity and mortality rates and many health problems have appeared, the most serious of which are as follows:

1. A survey conducted in 1997 showed that the incidence of cancer was 1.7 times higher than in 1989, with leukaemia constituting 15.6 per cent of the cases in all age groups. In the under-15 age groups, the incidence of cancer has increased by 42.9 per cent and the incidence of lymphatic cancer and trachoma by 17.2 per cent and 16.5 per cent respectively.

2. The incidence of congenital abnormalities is 1.8 times higher than in 1989.

3. The incidence of infertility has risen from 477 cases in 1989 to 869 cases in 1997, in addition to cases of teratospermia.

4. An increase in the incidence of eye disease (cataracts) from 14,215 cases in 1989 to 25,560 in 1997.

5. An increase in the incidence of thyroid gland disorders from 123 cases in 1989 to 216 cases in 1997.

6. An increase in the incidence of renal failure from 5,199 cases in 1989 to 10,165 cases in 1997.

7. Depending on the period of latency, some of the diseases and phenomena caused by exposure to depleted uranium may not appear before the year 2005, 2025 or 2040.

Interruption of the development plan

The embargo has affected the current budget of the Ministry of Health in the following manner:

1. In 1990, a total of 290,850,000 Iraqi dinars were budgeted to cover the costs of health services for the population, who numbered 17,890,400 in that year, at a time when the dollar exchange rate in local markets was approximately 4 dinars.

2. In 1999, a total of 12,387,997,000 dinars were budgeted for the same purpose at a time when the population had increased to 22,989,200 persons and the dollar exchange rate on local markets had risen to approximately 1,920 dinars.

3. From the above, it is evident that the per capita share of the 1990 budget amounted to $8.25 per year, as compared with $0.27 in 1999.

The impact of the embargo on the investment process

1. In accordance with the Five-Year Plan, the amounts appropriated for the development of health institutions in all parts of the country amounted to 95 million dinars in 1990.

2. Due to the embargo, those projects have not yet been implemented. If their implementation had continued in a normal smooth manner, they would have been completed on schedule. The embargo has also affected the future plans of the Ministry of Health since, if those projects were to be implemented now, their estimated costs would be more than $46 billion at the present dollar exchange rate in the local market.

3. In addition, the embargo has affected the maintenance and repair of medical equipment and other requisites for medical services, the repair of which would now cost more than $5 billion.